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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: LIFE ON THE STEPPE, MARCH 14-20

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¶1. (U) This is another in a series of weekly cables drawn mostly from public media, as well as think-tank, NGO, and opposition web-sites, selected to show the diversity of life in Kazakhstan, and information about it available to citizens of Kazakhstan. Our goal is to choose what might interest and be of use to various end-users in Washington and -- especially -- to provide a more complex view from the other side of the world, illustrating the vitality (and sometimes the quirkiness) of discourse available to citizens of Kazakhstan.

MODERN, TWO-STORY YURT TO BE BUILT IN ALMATY

¶2. (U) The yurt, the traditional dwelling structure used by nomadic tribes in the steppes of Central Asia, is getting an upgrade for a new generation of urban nomads. Thus, Almaty will soon see a new type of yurt, not in the form of a portable tent but rather as a fully-functioning multi-bedroom, two-story house. This yurt will have all modern amenities but will also keep its traditional elements including the "shanyrak," the traditional opening for ventilation at the top of a yurt -- which is also a symbol of family, peace, and tranquility. The project is the brainchild of Askhat Bakirov, a young architect from Semey. His idea of incorporating the traditional Kazakh yurt into the design of a contemporary home already won him the first prize for "best residential project" at a design competition in Astana last year.

¶3. (U) A request to use Bakirov's design to actually build such a modern yurt came soon afterwards. The young architect gladly provided all charts and blueprints and in return only requested to be invited to the house-warming party when the yurt is finished. "An idea that becomes reality is the greatest reward a creative person could ask for." Bakirov is proud of his deep patriotism and says: "Every summer a yurt was my home. And even then, I pondered the idea of building a contemporary yurt with the beloved 'shanyrak' instead of a regular family house. What could be closer, more familiar, more vibrant?"

"HONEST" CORRUPT OFFICIAL DETAINED RETURNING BRIBE

¶4. (U) An official from the Department of Migration and Demographics in Kostanai oblast (region) promised to register a local family as "oralman" returnees. (COMMENT: Oralman are ethnic Kazakh immigrants

from other countries. They are often eligible for special government-provided resettlement benefits. END COMMENT.) Since it is apparently not easy to do such a fraudulent registration, the official received \$2,000 from the family for his services. As it turned out, the official was unable to fulfill his promise and decided to return the bribe. That, however, was not the turn of events envisaged by the "oralman" family, and thus they sent a letter to the local office of the Committee for National Security (KNB). Several days later, the "honest" official was detained after being caught red-handed returning the bribe.

DANGEROUS WORK AGAINST WILDLIFE POACHERS

15. (U) Combating poaching of the saiga antelope is a very difficult task. In fact, the vast territory of the Kazakhstani steppe and the minimal resources available to patrolling rangers makes it nearly impossible. Additionally, recreational "hunters" have increasingly joined poor villagers in hunting the antelope for its valuable horns. Protecting the saiga has also become more dangerous because poachers have been turning their guns against the rangers.

16. (U) In an incident reported by the daily newspaper "Vremya," several rangers monitoring the steppe in Mangistau oblast by helicopter came under fire from a well-armed group of local poachers. Initially, the rangers thought they were conducting a routine check of a suspicious convoy of two SUVs and two motorcycles driving on the empty steppe, far from any inhabited area. Yet, as the rangers approached, the suspects opened fire against their descending helicopter. Clearly intending to chase the patrol away, a passenger in one of the SUVs fired several times, only stopping when the helicopter crew retaliated and hit the driver and passenger of the SUV.

17. (U) To the surprise of the rangers after they finally landed, one of the suspected poachers ran towards the helicopter holding a police ID in his hand. Needless to say, the check was officially

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over, and the rangers were not allowed to conduct a search or confiscate the suspects' weapons. Local police, informed of the incident, did not prove helpful and announced that they could not find the suspects. However, not long after, the attackers came to the surface. A police official whom the rangers suspected of illegally hunting the endangered saiga blamed the rangers with staging the whole attack and sued them for 10 million tenge (\$67,000) in damages. While the last word has probably not been spoken on this case, it appears that the effort to protect the saiga will not become any easier.

HOAGLAND